

January 21, 2018  
Sunday Evening Service  
Series: Deuteronomy  
Community Baptist Church  
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Greer, SC 29650  
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## FAILURE TO FOLLOW Deuteronomy 1:19-46

Many years ago, the Bible scholar F.B. Meyer was sailing from Northern Ireland to England. As the ship was approaching the harbor, Meyer looked at the array of lights and wondered how the ship's captain knew which one to follow in order to enter the harbor. Meyer met the captain on the deck and posed his question. The captain said, "Come with me." He took Meyer up to the bridge and pointed out a bright light on the left. He said, "Do you see that bright light over there?" "Yes." "And do you see that bright light to the right of it?" "Yes." "Then do you see the really bright light nearest us?" "Yes," Meyer said. "Well now watch what happens." As the ship drew nearer and nearer the harbor the light to the left and the light to the right of it seemed to merge with the bright light. The captain explained, "All I need to do is line up the three lights. Once I have them lined up behind the bright light, I just steer the ship straight ahead."

That story is similar to us knowing and doing God's will. Sometimes we wish we had precise and direct statements like God's will expressed through Moses to the people. We don't. God speaks to us through His Word by which He gives us principles of His will. That is the bright light. God also directs us through circumstances which He controls. That is a light. Then there is the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives that gives us confidence about God's will. When these three "lights" are lined up, all we need to do is steer straight ahead.

But what happens if we doubt God? What if we are either ignorant of or choose to reject the principles of the Bible? What if we are out of fellowship and grieving the Holy Spirit? We are not going

to be able line up the lights when we are in rebellion against God. The result will be crashing our ship on the rocks of consequences.

That is what happened to the first generation of God's nation Israel. God clearly revealed His will to them. They doubted God and rebelled against His will. God let their ships crash and they all died in the wilderness. Now their children were standing in the same spot where their parents had rebelled against God forty years earlier. How would this generation of God's people respond? Will they learn as Moses relates the story about their parent's foolish rebellion? How would you respond?

### Often the Rebel's Problem is God (vv.19-31).

God's will looks good at first (vv.19-25). Like those ancient Israelites, we might know to follow God and His will even through tough times at first. *Then we set out from Horeb and went through all that great and terrifying wilderness that you saw, on the way to the hill country of the Amorites, as the LORD our God commanded us. And we came to Kadesh-barnea. And I said to you, "You have come to the hill country of the Amorites, which the LORD our God is giving us. See, the LORD your God has set the land before you. Go up, take possession, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has told you. Do not fear or be dismayed"* (vv.19-21).

The *hill country of the Amorites* was the central part of the Promised Land. The people had come to the threshold of God's promise. Everyone seemed to be excited about doing God's will. They could virtually look over the Jordan River and see what God had promised. They should have been excited because, according to God's plan, all systems were "go."

The people should have been chomping at the bit to go in and possess the land because Moses reminded the people that *God has set the land . . .* (v.21). Here the verb is perfect tense for the English "give." It means that God has already given the land. This is an example of the "already/not" yet principle that describes so much of God's will in life. For example, God has already promised us victory, the fullness of salvation. But we do not have it yet. We are always working in the "overcoming" stage against sin. We call this progressive sanctification.

The people who stood near the Jordan looking into the Promised Land should have had faith that God would do what He promised having “already given the land.” As we exercise faith in God through the “working” process, God expands and strengthens our faith. It is in the trusting phases of life that our faith grows. Seeing God work in the past strengthens our faith for the future. That is how it is supposed to work. But, in this case, the people had already experienced God caring for them in His will while they traveled through the very dangerous and difficult desert. When it came time to exercise faith, they should have been able to do so. They didn’t.

Why did Moses warn the people not to *fear* or be *dismayed*? He was a good and wise leader. He had a pretty good idea that the inhabitants of the land were not going to meet Israel with the “Welcome Wagon.”

The people demonstrated our shared human trait of tending to want to be in control even when we’re supposed to be doing God’s will (vv.22-25). *Then all of you came near me and said, “Let us send men before us, that they may explore the land for us and bring us word again of the way by which we must go up and the cities into which we shall come.” The thing seemed good to me, and I took twelve men from you, one man from each tribe. And they turned and went up into the hill country, and came to the Valley of Eshcol and spied it out. And they took in their hands some of the fruit of the land and brought it down to us, and brought us word again and said, “It is a good land that the LORD our God is giving us” (vv.22-25).*

Normally we would say, checking out the landscape, giving serious consideration to the next move, makes a lot of sense. However, coming right after God’s very clear command to go in and take the land, we might question if this was a demonstration of doubt. Were the people planning maneuvers or were they trying to determine if indeed they would follow God’s will—assuming everything looked favorable? It appears that the spy mission was actually a survey trip to see if the people thought it was a good idea to obey God. Also, it appears that maybe after thirty-eight years of after-thought, Moses had second thoughts about the wisdom of agreeing with this plan. But at the moment, it must have seemed right, partly because everyone agreed, *It is a good land that the LORD our God is giving us (v.25).*

There are some good lessons for us in this story. We generally do not have such clear statements from God about His will like, “Go into this particular land and I will deliver it to you.” But we do have clear principles in Scripture. God also arranges circumstantial evidence for us. And beyond that help, God often gives us complete confidence about what we should do, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Still, because we don’t have precise statements from God, we are wise to do research. Once we are convinced a particular course is God’s will, we must press on in the matter. And as with Moses, hindsight is always 20/20.

The great problem with doubting God is that it often leads to rebellion (vv.26-31). That is true, but a realistic view of the cost of God’s will can be disheartening which causes doubt. *Yet you would not go up, but rebelled against the command of the LORD your God. And you murmured in your tents and said, “Because the LORD hated us he has brought us out of the land of Egypt, to give us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us. Where are we going up? Our brothers have made our hearts melt, saying, ‘The people are greater and taller than we. The cities are great and fortified up to heaven. And besides, we have seen the sons of the Anakim there’” (vv.26-28).*

Notice how the text lists three good reasons why the people were afraid (v.28). First, the inhabitants of the land were greater and taller than God’s people. Second, the cities were impregnable. And third, the relatives of the famed giants lived there. Okay all of that was true. But the people should have considered all of that against the backdrop of God’s command. Instead, they listened to human opinions about those scary problems.

Human words and advice that is in conflict with God’s clear statements will cause the hearts of God’s people to melt (i.e. be afraid to trust God). When we doubt God’s Word, we fail to trust Him. When we do not trust God, we give way to Satan’s lies. Satan’s big lie is that God doesn’t care, God doesn’t know, or God isn’t listening. When we side with Satan against God, it really does appear that God has become our enemy and hates us.

Repeat: “Do not be afraid.” *Then I said to you, “Do not be in dread or afraid of them. The LORD your God who goes before you will himself fight for you, just as he did for you in Egypt before your eyes, and in the wilderness, where you have seen how the LORD your*

*God carried you, as a man carries his son, all the way that you went until you came to this place” (vv.29-31).*

Again Moses begged the people not to be afraid. The Hebrew word means to be caused to tremble. The NASB translates the word *shocked*. “Why shouldn’t we be afraid, Moses? Look at the facts, Moses!” Moses appealed to the people by focusing entirely on God. He argued that Yahweh, who is their personal God, would go before them just like He went before them on the trip from Horeb to Kadish-Barnea. He would keep them like He kept them through the terrifying wilderness. God promised that He would fight for His people just like He did against the Egyptians. So why would the people now decide that God might quit carrying them like a faithful father carries his beloved son?

This is why we need to set up an Ebenezer or two in our lives. What is that? When God helped Israel defeat the stronger, larger army of the Philistines, Samuel set up a “stone of remembrance” to remind the people that God is faithful. Has God not helped you in the past? Has God not answered prayer in the past? Don’t buy into Satan’s lie that God is not faithful and wind up in rebellion against God. Look back to that stone, that monument, that reminds you that God is faithful.

### **No One Fights God and Wins (vv.32-46).**

In every conflict with God, God’s Word is the final authority (vv.32-39). Therefore, it is not the individual, but God determines who stays outside of His promises. This story reminds us of the principle that those who do not believe the LORD forfeit His blessings. *Yet in spite of this word you did not believe the LORD your God, who went before you in the way to seek you out a place to pitch your tents, in fire by night and in the cloud by day, to show you by what way you should go (vv.32-33).*

The words *in spite of this* convey biting recompense. God had revealed Himself in so many ways to be the loving, caring, protecting, providing Heavenly Father. He went ahead of the people and cleared the way like a pioneer. He showed them where to camp along the way. He protected them with the fire at night and shadowing cloud by day. He was the consummate GPS who never

made a mistake and didn’t say, “Recalculating.” Rather God said, “No that is not my instruction. You are determined to go your own way? Okay, you don’t get to enter the Promised Land and you will die in the desert.” And as a result, the people paid the ultimate price for rejecting God’s authority.

We are not wise to make God angry because those with whom the LORD is angry are left outside His promises. *And the LORD heard your words and was angered, and he swore, “Not one of these men of this evil generation shall see the good land that I swore to give to your fathers” (vv.34-35).* It is almost shocking to realize that there are more references to God’s wrath in the Bible than to His love. That is because sin, which He abhors, is the norm in His creation. That is because His holy nature cannot respond positively or even tolerantly to what He abhors.

God’s response of wrath is in keeping with His holy, faithful character. Notice that in this case *He swore* (v.34,35) twice to the stubborn people. That is He affirmed the certainty of His Word. This is a grim reminder that God must be faithful to consign to everlasting punishment every person who rejects Jesus Christ’s sacrifice for the atonement of their sins. It is also a reminder that God will not tolerate sin in His child’s life. At some point, God is going to let it be known that He is angry about that sin. God’s wrath is an unpleasant topic, but it should be seriously considered. Until we are familiar with God’s wrath directed toward us personally, we will not see any need for His grace. The certainty and backdrop of God’s hot, boiling wrath because of our offenses against Him, makes the certainty and promise of His grace to forgive brilliantly beautiful to the penitent sinner.

Not even God’s choice servant could enter God’s blessing. *Even with me the LORD was angry on your account and said, “You also shall not go in there” (v.37).* The people made God angry and Moses got caught up in the battle. The psalmist gave a bit of the history when he wrote, *They angered him at the waters of Meribah, and it went ill with Moses on their account, for they made his spirit bitter, and he spoke rashly with his lips (Psalm 106:32-33).*

It appears that Moses’s sin was to speak rashly so that he robbed God of His glory. *Then Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock, and he said to them, “Hear now, you rebels: shall we bring water for you out of this rock?” (Numbers 20:10).* But

several times in Scripture it is clear that the stubborn, self-willed people were the cause for Moses's lapse. Still Moses was responsible before God for his reaction to the people. It seems like such a simple sin compared to sins we know and do. But God who knows all things is always just in His consequences whether it is judgment or blessing.

God also determines who gets in to enjoy His promises (vv.36, 38-39). Caleb entered the promise of God because he wholly followed Him. We read that none of that first generation entered the Promised Land *except Caleb the son of Jephunneh. He shall see it, and to him and to his children I will give the land on which he has trodden, because he has wholly followed the LORD!* (v.36).

Catch the very important phrase, "*He has wholly followed the LORD.*" That same phrase was used to describe Caleb in Numbers 14:24; Joshua 14:14 also. It literally means that "he completely filled himself after the LORD." In practical terms that means that Caleb was different from everyone else in Israel (broad stroke accusation) apart from Moses and Joshua because he was consumed with God. He was not consumed with the law of God – though he no doubt tried to obey it. He was not consumed with the works of God – though he was no doubt impressed with them. But Caleb was consumed with the person of God. That is why he stood fast against virtually the whole nation.

And also, God permitted Joshua to enter His promise because he also followed after God because he would be the new leader. *Joshua the son of Nun, who stands before you, he shall enter. Encourage him, for he shall cause Israel to inherit it* (v.38). Joshua also was obedient to God because he trusted God. He was God's next ordained leader after Moses died. God's will was to use Joshua to help Israel inherit God's promise.

Try to imagine this scene where Moses is addressing the second generation. Everyone had died except Joshua, Caleb and Moses . . . and Moses had one foot in the grave. Were Joshua and Caleb thankful that God had graciously kept them from rebellion? So were the people of generation "two" because God would give His promise to them. *And as for your little ones, who you said would become a prey, and your children, who today have no knowledge of good or evil, they shall go in there. And to them I will give it, and they shall possess it* (v.39). God had promised that the children would inherit the land.

Probably even at that point a lot of the people doubted God's promise.

This story almost begs us to make application toward the principle of salvation or at least regarding God's blessings. In one way, this is the principle of salvation. Rebels reject God's promise. Rebels doubt God's Word. Rebels prefer their own way and will. God is angry with them and will not let them into heaven. But those who trust God in the promise of salvation through faith in Christ enter the Everlasting Rest.

As with most analogies, this one breaks down at Moses who truly did enter God's Everlasting Rest, and even later was used to encourage Christ Himself at the transfiguration. However, the scene can picture well the difference between those who trust God and receive His blessings and those who doubt God's will or power and suffer consequences. Trust and obey is still the most effective way to be happy in Jesus.

In contrast to trusting God, the story reminds us that stubbornness against God never wins (vv.40-46). The first generation of God's people taught us that some decisions cannot be reversed. *But as for you, turn, and journey into the wilderness in the direction of the Red Sea. Then you answered me, "We have sinned against the LORD. We ourselves will go up and fight, just as the LORD our God commanded us." And every one of you fastened on his weapons of war and thought it easy to go up into the hill country. And the LORD said to me, "Say to them, Do not go up or fight, for I am not in your midst, lest you be defeated before your enemies." So I spoke to you, and you would not listen; but you rebelled against the command of the LORD and presumptuously went up into the hill country. Then the Amorites who lived in that hill country came out against you and chased you as bees do and beat you down in Seir as far as Hormah* (vv.40-44).

When the people came to grips with God's judgment against their sins, they changed their minds. That does not indicate that they decided to stop rebelling against God. Rather they continued their rebellion by trying to do what God now forbid them to do. When they saw that they had made a bad decision, they should have humbled themselves before God and put themselves at His disposal. When we charge ahead doing "right" contrary to God's will, there will be

consequences. This is the principle of trying to do the right thing contrary to God's will, like David moving the ark on a cart. It never works.

Repentance is good, but there are still ramifications for losing the battle with God (vv.45-46). The people repented. *And you returned and wept before the LORD, but the LORD did not listen to your voice or give ear to you (v.45)*. The first generation personally experienced God's promised judgment. This is like getting caught in a sin versus confessing a sin to God and forsaking it. There is always a question about sincerity of repentance when the sinner is discovered and exposed. Is the person weeping because he or she is sorry for sinning against God? Or is the person weeping because he or she is so humiliated at being caught in sin? Based on the subsequent history of God's people, we have reason to doubt the sincerity of their repentance.

The ramifications of rebellion came to bear as the people began the process of a forty year disintegration. Moses taught their children, *So you remained at Kadesh many days, the days that you remained there (v.46)*. When there is true repentance, there is the privilege of asking God to remove, temper, or provide grace with the consequences. David did that in a few of the psalms. It doesn't appear the first generation Israelites were interested in that. Which is another indication they did not truly repent.

Moses was now talking to the second generation, the children who God had promised would possess the "land." What were they thinking as they heard Moses rehearse their parents' stubborn failures? Did their parents' failure and subsequent judgment impact the second generation's desire to walk faithfully with the Lord? Can we learn from history? If we do not, we are destined to repeat it.